

The Democratic whip.

SENIOR SENATOR FROM
MARYLAND

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let me just echo the comments of our Democratic leader, Senator REID, in relation to Senator MIKULSKI. I will save a few moments perhaps next week to speak my own tribute to her and give my own reminiscences. But I didn't want to abruptly change the subject without saying I am in total agreement with Senator REID in terms of the quality of service and friendship that we have had with the senior Senator from the State of Maryland.

DACA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor this morning to talk about an issue that I have raised many times from this very spot, and it is an issue relative to the undocumented young people living in America—undocumented because they are not legally in this country. They were brought here—many of them as infants, toddlers, or children—by their families. They were not aware of the family decision, other than the fact that they were in a car and moving into the United States. They didn't really appreciate where they came from. Many of them never knew where they came from. Some of them don't even speak the language of the country of their birth. They were brought here as children. They believed from the beginning they were part of America. In most, except in extraordinary circumstances, they were not even told of their immigration status at an early age.

So they grew up going to school in America. They learned English. They pledged allegiance to the only flag they had ever known. They sang the national anthem of this country believing they were part of this country. At some point, though, there was this realization and disclosure that they were not. Legally, they weren't. They were undocumented.

So these children were raised in the shadow of uncertainty—uncertain as to whether a knock on the door at any time of day or night might change their world forever; whether or not their parents might be deported from this country and they would have to go with them; or, God forbid, that something would happen to them and they would be deported. They lived with that fear for a long time.

I came to understand it when a Korean girl in Chicago who was looking for an opportunity to go to college because of her musical skills, realized she was undocumented and might not be able to do it. So she came to our office, told us of her situation, and we tried to help.

So 15 years ago I introduced a bill called the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act said that for young people brought to this country under the age of 16 and

who have lived here successfully, completed school, and have no criminal record to disqualify them, we should give them a chance—give them a chance to become legal in America and give them a chance, from my point of view, to become citizens. I introduced the bill 15 years ago. It has been debated. The word DREAMer came out of it and has now become pretty well-known across America to describe this group of young people.

A few years ago, I prevailed on the President of the United States, Barack Obama, to give them a fighting chance to stay here. So by Executive action, he created something called DACA. DACA is the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program. This would allow these young people, undocumented, to step forward and disclose their status, come up with a filing fee of almost \$500, and go through a process where they were submitted to a criminal background check. If they cleared all the hurdles, they would be given a temporary—underline the word temporary—right to live in the United States without fear of deportation and to work in this country.

So over the years, since the President's Executive action, 744,000 young people have come forward. Their lives are amazing. I have told their stories over and over. Imagine, if you will, that you lived in fear of being deported tomorrow or fear that your family would be broken up and how that would weigh on you as a young person. So they did something that was maybe rash in the eyes of their parents but heroic in my eyes. They stepped forward, out of the shadows, and said: If the United States of America has set legal standards for us to follow to stay here, we will comply with them. Their parents warned them and their friends warned them: You are turning yourself in. You are telling this government who you are, where you are, and where they can find you. But they did it anyway, and I encouraged them to do it, and many others did as well, saying: If you show good faith in this country, good faith in this government, I will do everything in my power to make sure it isn't used against you.

Now we have reached a new stage in our history with a new President coming who has different views on immigration than the outgoing President. My concern, and a concern shared by millions across America, is this: What is going to happen to these young kids—744,000 of them—who are currently in college, in high school, in professional schools, such as medical schools and law schools? They are doing amazing things with their lives, and yet things could happen immediately to change their status.

I have talked to a number of my colleagues on the floor on both sides of the aisle about this, and there are pretty strong emotions about helping these young people. One of the leaders on this has been my friend and ally on immigration issues—on some immigra-

tion issues—and that is LINDSEY GRAHAM of South Carolina. He and I talked about introducing legislation that would give a temporary stay so these young people could be protected until Congress does its work and comes up with an immigration bill that addresses this issue and many more.

Senator GRAHAM and I discussed it again this morning, and we even hope to have this bill ready before we leave next week—a bipartisan effort to say to the new President: Give these young people a fighting chance. At least protect them until we have had a chance to act on the larger immigration issues before us. I hope that colleagues on both sides will join us.

There has been a lot of talk about what the next Congress will look like and what we will do, how we will tackle the biggest issues of our time. The Affordable Care Act, for example, which I was proud to support, is clearly controversial. There wasn't a single Republican Senator who voted for it. Some want to repeal it and replace it. Some are suggesting we will repeal it, but do it with 2 years in advance.

So 2 years from now there might be a new Affordable Care Act. That puts us in a responsible position of coming up with an alternative in that period of time. I don't know if that is how this conversation will end, but I would suggest the same logic could apply when it comes to immigration: At least give us the time to come up with an alternative on immigration, and during that period of time, let us protect these youngest people.

The stories I have told on the floor say more about this issue than any words I can express, and I want to tell another one of those stories this morning. This is about a young man from Illinois. His name is Asael Reyes. Here is his picture. He has his University of Illinois at Chicago T-shirt on. He is an interesting young man.

He came to the United States at the age of 5, brought here from Mexico. He grew up on the North Side of Chicago. He is a bright young man, but he learned he was undocumented early in life. He really got despondent over the thought that he could lose everything and have to be forced to leave America. His classes were a challenge to him, and with this fear in his mind he started doing very poorly. In fact, he dropped out of high school. He said it weighed heavily on his mind that he might have to leave.

He said:

I felt that because of my status, I had no future. As a result, my grades and attendance plummeted and I struggled to do anything productive.

Then, in 2012, President Obama announced DACA, and everything changed for Asael Reyes. Here is how he explains it:

DACA meant that I had a future worth fighting for, and because of that I returned to school and reignited my passion for study. Because of DACA, I want to do whatever I can to contribute to my country.